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Shotgun Blasts Killed Southern Students

(Cover)

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BATON ROUGE — (UPI) — The state commission conducting secret hearings on the deaths of two students at Southern University two weeks ago has concluded the black youths were killed by blasts from shotguns.

The report last night by William Guste Jr., commission chairman and state attorney general, was the first official confirmation that gunshots caused the deaths Nov. 16 of Denver Smith and Leonard Brown, both 20.

Guste said that while the decision should not be considered a "final finding of fact, it is clearly established by the coroner's report that the two deaths were caused by a shotgun. The pellets were found in the bodies of the two students that were killed."

"Our commission is doing an in-depth and careful investigation, and before we release any conclusions we want them to be properly documented," Guste said.

The coroner's report said the wounds were caused by pellets the size of No. 3 or No. 4 buckshot, but Gov. Edwin Edwards said the report did not prove the pellets came from a shotgun. They might have been fired, he said, by an explosive device.

An unofficial "Black People's Committee of Inquiry" held two days of hearings on the incident and concluded earlier this week that Edwards and other officials were to blame for the deaths of the students and that the shots were fired by sheriff's deputies.

Fewer than a dozen persons have testified before the state commission in its three days of secret hearings. A spokesman has emphasized this indicates the thoroughness of the investigation.

Guste has said his commission hopes to move to the students' version of the shooting shortly.